

Job Front: Free technology training, certification offered

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Sacramento-area job seekers can pick up vouchers for free technology training and certification testing through a new initiative by Microsoft Corp.

Microsoft's Elevate America program launched in California last month, and vouchers for the free training are now available on a first-come, first-served basis at Sacramento Works One-Stop Centers in Citrus Heights, Galt, North Highlands, Rancho Cordova and Sacramento.

Anyone can pick up the vouchers while they last, said Terri Carpenter, a spokeswoman for the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency. Ask for the Elevate America Microsoft Online Training voucher.

"We look at the program as an opportunity for individuals who would like to get basic and intermediate IT training at no cost," said Akhtar Badshah, a Microsoft global community affairs director. "The goal is to ensure that those who require (training) get better jobs."

Increasingly, IT skills are seen as a gateway to employment and higher pay. Microsoft officials cite federal labor statistics showing more than 75 percent of U.S. jobs require at least basic technology skills.

"Building competency by training is key," Badshah said. "You see a correlation between qualifications and the ability to earn a living independent of any subsidies. That's a good thing."

With the E-Learning vouchers, people can learn entry-level skills in Windows Vista and Office 2003 or Office 2007.

IT Professional Learning vouchers are also available for information technology professionals interested in bolstering their skills.

Once they've completed the training, they can pick up vouchers to test for certification in Excel, Word, Outlook and other Microsoft programs.

The training is self-directed. Users can work at career centers or libraries from home or anywhere computers are available to the public. Users have six months to complete the training and six months to test for certification.

"This is another opportunity to be trained for IT skills at no cost," Carpenter said. Tests for Microsoft certification, however, must be taken at a Microsoft-certified testing center. Referrals are provided through the local One-Stop centers.

Microsoft is investing some \$8 million in cash and software into the program over the next two years.

The company has issued about 360,000 vouchers – including about 165,000 in California – for training and testing in 18 states since debuting the program in March 2009, Badshah said.

To find a One-Stop Career Center, call the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency at (916) 263-3800 or visit www.seta.net and select "job seeker services," then "One-Stop Career Centers" to find the nearest center.

Sleep Train plans hires

Sacramento-based mattress retailer Sleep Train is hiring local sales associates, part of a 10 percent company-wide staff increase, officials announced.

The firm plans to interview candidates in May and begin hiring in June, said Tracy Jackson, a Sleep Train vice president, on Friday.

Sleep Train officials say the hiring is prompted by anticipated sales growth. Jackson added that could mean future hiring of operations, customer service and support staff.

Sleep Train offers a standard suite of benefits including dental, vision and 401(k) retirement.

To apply, visit www.sleeptrain.com and click on the "About us" tab.

Career centers land grants

Three Sacramento-area One-Stop Career Centers will split \$165,000 in federal Labor Department grants to help people receiving unemployment insurance find new work, officials announced.

The awards, called Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment grants, will fund interviews of unemployment insurance claimants by Employment Development Department staffers, said Patti Roberts, an EDD spokeswoman.

The sites are Sacramento Works One-Stop Career Center Mark Sanders Complex, 2901 50th St., Sacramento; Roseville One-Stop Career Center, 1880 Sierra Gardens Drive, Suite 100, Roseville; and Yuba County One-Stop Center Business and Workforce Development, 1114 Yuba St., in Marysville. The money is part of nearly \$3.5 million slated for career centers statewide. In all, \$50 million is being awarded to 33 states and the District of Columbia, labor department officials announced.

"One-Stop Career Centers provide unemployment insurance beneficiaries the help and resources they need to find good jobs," said Labor Secretary Hilda Solis in a statement announcing the awards.

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